The Recipes of Mamounette

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These pages gather the recipes of **Chama OURABAH**, known as **Mamounette**, just as she shared them, with her words, her gestures, and her secrets.
We have preserved them in their authenticity, like a notebook of memory and flavors.

Born in Constantine in 1931, Chama BENCHIKH-EL-FEGOUN lived her life with courage and tenderness, offering her family a legacy more precious than gold, the love of home, the warmth of a table always open, the generosity of a shared dish.

She was our mother, our grandmother, and so much more, the guardian of our traditions, the living memory of Constantine, and the joyful heart of our family gatherings, In her hands, cooking became a language of love and an unbreakable bond between generations, between Algeria and France, between past and future.

Every couscous, every brioche, every honeyed sweetness she prepared was an embrace, a smile, a blessing offered to those she loved, Today, her recipes still live on, they carry the trace of her laughter, her patience, her endless tenderness.

This notebook is a tribute to her memory, In every rediscovered dish, it is **Mamounette** who still accompanies us, like a gentle and faithful presence, gathering around her children, grandchildren, and friends, in the warm light of Constantine's flavors.

The Utensils of Mamounette

In Mamounette's kitchen, recipes lived as much in gestures as in objects. Her utensils were not mere tools. They carried the marks of time, the ingrained aromas, the familiar sounds that made the heart of the house beat.

The couscoussier (keskes)

A large pot in copper or aluminum, made of two levels. In the bottom, meat and vegetables simmered in their fragrant sauce. On top, the semolina swelled gently with steam. When the lid trembled and the steam escaped singing, the whole house knew that couscous was on its way.

The gasʿa

A wide bowl in wood or terracotta, deep and round. It was the stage of couscous. The damp grains rolled there under patient hands, melted butter mixed in, and the air filled with warm scents. Every dish began in this basin, and every child's laughter mingled there as well.

The flat galette pan (tajine plat)

A thick disk of terracotta or cast iron, placed directly on embers or on the flame. It was the sacred tool of kesra and tiboujajine. Its rough surface gave the flatbreads their unique taste, both grilled and tender. It was never washed with much water. It kept within it the memory of all the batches, like an old kitchen companion.

The deep tajine

Less wide, more hollow, it served to simmer sauces and vegetables. In it went the tchetrâ, the fragrant tajines, the sauces that slowly thickened. Its diffused heat gave the dishes their constant softness.

The mortar and pestle

Heavy and resonant, it echoed with every strike. Garlic, salt, cumin were crushed slowly, releasing powerful aromas. The sound of the pestle set the rhythm of the kitchen, like a simple prayer before the meal.

The deep frying pan

Blackened by use, it held the oil for frying. Golden bourek, crispy griwech, sfenj puffed with bubbles. The crackling of the oil always called the children, who waited for the first bites still burning hot.

The large ceramic dish

Colored with discreet motifs, it appeared only during feasts or great gatherings. In this dish the chakhchoukha, the dolma, or the tchetrâ were presented. Placed at the center of the table, it became a hearth around which the family gathered.

The wooden spoon

Simple, worn, marked with cracks. It stirred the sauces, tasted in secret, corrected the seasoning. In its wood lived the memory of all the shared meals.

The metal trays

Large, round, shining, they passed from hand to hand. On them rested glasses of tea, plates of pastries, dried fruits. They gleamed in the light and reflected the smiling faces of the guests.

1.The Sunday Dishes chez Mamounette

The great classics she placed at the center of the family table

The Black Couscous

In Constantine, *sekxou lk'hal* (كسكسو لكحل) is prepared with a particular wheat semolina. In the past, wheat was stored in silos dug into the ground. The grains taken from the center produced white couscous, while the grains very close to the earthen walls took on a stronger, more fermented taste and became black couscous, rare and precious, reserved for large family gatherings.

INGREDIENTS

- Meat of choice (~1 kg)
- 2 onions
- 500 g turnips
- 500 g small zucchinis
- 1 bunch of baby artichokes
- 250 g chickpeas
- Black couscous
- Olive oil and butter
- Seasoning
- (salt, black pepper, paprika, cinnamon, saffron).

PREPARATION

Meat

In a pot or couscoussier, sauté the meat cut into small pieces for a few minutes with two tablespoons of olive oil and a bit of butter, the grated onions, and seasoning to taste (salt, black pepper, paprika, cinnamon, saffron).

When the pieces are nicely browned, cover with water and bring to a boil. Add the turnips (cut as desired) and the chickpeas, and let cook.

Vegetables

Cut the zucchinis into pieces, prepare the artichokes, and add them to the sauce 30 minutes after cooking begins. Let simmer until the meat and vegetables are perfectly cooked.

Couscous

Meanwhile, in a large bowl, wash and roll the couscous with cold water. Once it has absorbed the rinse water, place it in the top part of the couscoussier over the pot. When you see the steam rising through the grains, let it steam for 6 minutes.

Remove the top of the couscoussier (leave the pot on the fire) and pour the grains

into a separate bowl. Separate the grains with both hands and sprinkle with a little salted cold water while mixing. Once the water is absorbed, return the grains to the top of the couscoussier and steam them a second time for 6 minutes.

Remove the top of the couscoussier again (leave the pot on the fire) and pour the grains into a separate bowl. Separate the grains with both hands. Take a ladleful of the "meat + vegetables" sauce, season with salt and pepper, add a small knob of butter, and pour the ladleful over the grains while mixing. Let rest a few minutes so the couscous absorbs the liquid well. (If the grains are too hard, add a bit of water.)

Return the grains to the top of the couscoussier and steam them a third time until they are tender. Taste as you go, and if they dry out too much before being cooked, sprinkle with a little water.

Place the couscous, the meat and vegetables, and the sauce in three separate dishes. At the time of serving, add a small knob of butter to the couscous.
Do not add too much sauce when serving, couscous "does not like" to be too wet.

The Vegetable Couscous

An emblematic dish of all Algeria, the Constantinian *keksou* (كسكسو) is distinguished by a fine and light semolina grain, accompanied by a fragrant sauce with vegetables and lamb. Served separately, couscous, meat, and vegetables come together on the plate to express the hospitality and culinary richness of the region.

INGREDIENTS (for 4)

- One lamb shoulder cut into pieces (with bone if possible)
- 2 large onions
- 1 clove of garlic
- 1 stalk of celery
- 1 pound of zucchinis
- 1 pound of turnips
- 3–4 carrots
- 2 small artichokes
- 300 grams of chickpeas
- Olive oil, two tablespoons
- 150 grams of butter
- Mild oil (canola, peanut, or argan), two tablespoons
- Seasoning
- (salt, black pepper, paprika, couscous spice blend). One level teaspoon of each.
- 1 kilo of couscous

PREPARATION

Meat

Place the lamb pieces in a pot or couscoussier and add two tablespoons of olive oil, the butter, salt, black pepper, paprika, and the grated onions with crushed garlic, along with the couscous spice blend. Brown the meat for a few minutes, and when well seared, cover with 2 liters of water and bring to a boil. Let simmer, keeping the water level steady.

Vegetables

If using dried chickpeas, soak them overnight and add them to the pot as soon as the water boils.

After half an hour, add the carrots and turnips cut into pieces to the meat, and continue cooking over low heat for 40 to 45 minutes.

Add the zucchini pieces and small artichokes 20 minutes before the end of cooking. Add the chickpeas at the same time if using canned, pre-cooked ones.

When the vegetables and meat are ready, check the seasoning of the broth and adjust the salt and pepper if necessary, then set aside.

If some guests enjoy a spicier taste, you can place part of the broth in another pot and

adjust the seasoning with Espelette pepper, or you can add a green or red chili pepper to the broth from the beginning of cooking.

Couscous

Meanwhile, pour the couscous into a large bowl, wash it, and roll it with cold water. Add a spoonful of salt. Once it has absorbed the water, add two tablespoons of mild oil (canola, peanut, or argan, but not olive) and mix. Place it in the top of the couscoussier over the pot. When you see the steam rising through the grains (about 10 minutes), let it steam for 10 to 15 minutes.

Remove the top of the couscoussier (leave the pot on the fire) and pour the grains into a separate bowl. Separate them with both hands and sprinkle with a little salted cold water while mixing. Once absorbed, return the grains to the top of the couscoussier and steam a second time for 10 to 15 minutes.

Remove the top again (leave the pot on the fire) and pour the grains into a bowl. Separate them with both hands, then set aside.

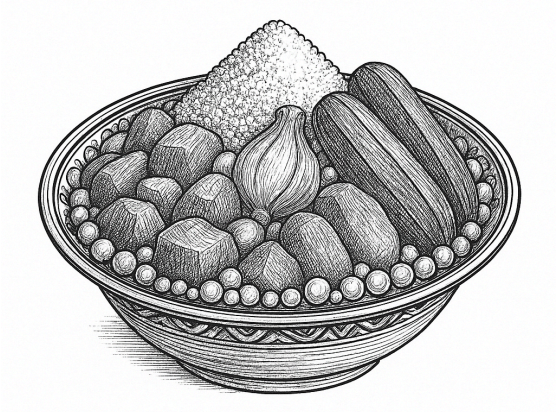
Fifteen minutes before serving, sprinkle the desired amount of couscous with a little cold water while mixing. Once absorbed, return the grains to the top of the couscoussier and steam a third time for 5 to 10 minutes until the grains are tender and hot.

Remove them and pour into the bowl. Place a generous piece of butter on top and let it melt. Mix well, separating the grains.

Pour the couscous into a beautiful round, deep glazed earthenware dish.

Remove the meat from the broth and serve it separately.

Pour the vegetables and broth into a deep dish and serve separately.



The Mesfouf with Dates

The *Mesfouf* (مسفوف) of Qsentena is a sweet couscous dish much loved in Constantine. Prepared with fine semolina steamed to perfection, it is traditionally served at breakfast, during Ramadan, at Mouloud, or to conclude a festive meal. In Constantine, it is often enhanced with dates, raisins, butter, and curdled milk (*leben*), sometimes with cooked chickpeas added for extra richness..

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g fine couscous (durum wheat semolina)
- 100 g melted butter
- 150 g pitted dates
- 100 g raisins
- 100 g cooked chickpeas (optional)
- Sugar (to taste)
- Milk to accompany

PREPARATION

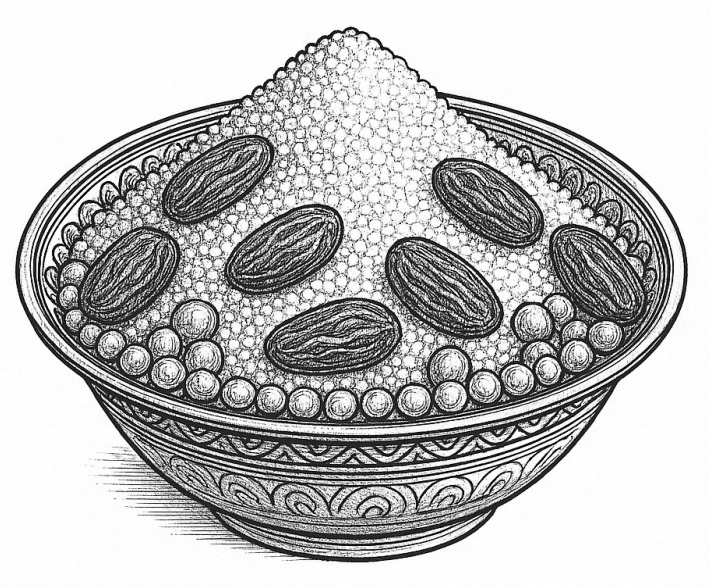
Put water in a pot or couscoussier and bring it to a boil.

Place the couscous in a *gasʿa* (large bowl) or basin, sprinkle it lightly with salted water, and roll it between your hands. Once it has absorbed the water, add two tablespoons of mild oil (canola, peanut, or argan, never olive) and mix with your hands.
Place it in the top of the couscoussier over the pot. When you see steam rising through the grains (about 10 minutes), let it steam for 10 to 15 minutes.
Remove the top and pour the grains into a separate bowl. Separate them with both hands and sprinkle with a little salted cold water while mixing. Once the water is absorbed, return the grains to the top of the couscoussier and steam a second time for 10 to 15 minutes.
Remove the top of the couscoussier again and pour the grains into a bowl. Separate them with both hands, then set aside.

Fifteen minutes before serving, sprinkle the desired amount of couscous with a little cold water while mixing. Once absorbed, return the grains to the top of the couscoussier and steam a third time for 5 to 10 minutes, until the grains are tender and hot.
Remove them and pour into the bowl. Place a generous piece of butter or *smen* on top and let it melt. Mix well, separating the grains so that each one is coated.
Add the raisins, chopped dates, and, if desired, the cooked chickpeas. Mix gently.

Present the *Mesfouf* (مسفوف) in a large round, deep glazed earthenware dish, topped with whole dates or dried fruits. Serve with a bowl of powdered sugar, and cups filled with *leben* or fresh cheese and extra raisins.

It is enjoyed warm, according to taste, and accompanied by a glass of fresh milk or *leben*, or with fresh cheese for a complete and comforting meal.



The Mesfouf with Green Peas

The *mesfouf b'l-djelbana* (مسفوف بالجلبانة) is a simple, springtime dish where fine semolina joins with the sweetness of fresh green peas. Light and butter-scented, it accompanies seasonal meals with freshness and conviviality.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g fine couscous (durum wheat semolina)
- 100 g butter
- 500 g green peas
- Salt
- Sugar (to taste)

PREPARATION

Put water in a pot or couscoussier and bring it to a boil.
Place the couscous in a *gas'a* (large bowl) or basin, sprinkle it lightly with salted water, and roll it between your hands. Once it has absorbed the water, place it in the top of the couscoussier over the pot. When you see the steam rising through the grains, let it steam for 10 to 15 minutes.
Remove the top of the couscoussier and pour the grains into a separate bowl. Separate them with both hands and sprinkle with a little salted cold water while mixing. Once the water is absorbed, return the grains to steam a second time for 10 to 15 minutes.
Repeat this process a third time, steaming until the grains are tender and hot.
Remove them and pour into the bowl. Place a generous piece of butter on top and let it melt. Mix well, separating the grains so that each grain is coated.

Shell the green peas and steam them separately for about 30 minutes (salt halfway through cooking).

Present the *Mesfouf b'l-djelbana* hot in a large round, deep glazed earthenware dish. Serve with the hot peas in a separate dish, a bowl of fresh cheese, and a bowl of powdered sugar (to taste).

The Tchetrâ

A constant starter on the Constantinian table, *felfel mchwi bel-tomates* (فلفل مشوي) highlights the simplicity of grilled vegetables. Soft peppers and peeled tomatoes simmer gently with a drizzle of olive oil and garlic, creating a fragrant cooked salad. Served warm or cold, it accompanies *kesra* bread and evokes the generosity of summer meals.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 red and green bell peppers
- 3 ripe tomatoes
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Salt, black pepper
- (Optional) a pinch of cumin or mild paprika
- Fresh flat-leaf parsley

PREPARATION

Grill the peppers in the oven under the broiler, turning them until the skin blackens. Wrap them in aluminum foil (or a cloth), let them cool slightly, then peel them. Remove the seeds and cut into strips.

Blanch the tomatoes in boiling water for 2 minutes, then refresh immediately in cold water. Peel off the skin and cut the flesh into pieces. In a pan, heat the olive oil and sauté the chopped garlic. Add the tomatoes, season with salt and pepper, cover, and let simmer for 10 minutes until softened.

Add the pepper strips, mix, cover, and continue cooking over low heat for 15 minutes. Adjust the seasoning with a little chili if you like. Sprinkle with flat-leaf parsley before serving. Enjoy warm or cold, with *kesra* bread for dipping.

The Trida – Pasta

The *trida* (طريدة) is a Constantinian dish made with very thin square pasta prepared by hand.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg fine durum wheat semolina
- 1 teaspoon salt
- Cold water
- Wheat starch or cornstarch

PREPARATION

Place the semolina in a large bowl, add the salt, and gradually moisten with water while kneading until you obtain a firm dough.

Form several balls, let them rest for 10 minutes, then roll them out thinly, sprinkling with starch.

Fold several times and cut into strips, then into small squares. Sprinkle again with starch, spread them out on a cloth, and let dry for 2 days before use.

The Trida – Sauce

The sauce for *trida* accompanies the homemade pasta, with meat, vegetables, and chickpeas flavored with spices.

INGREDIENTS

- Lamb or chicken
- Onions
- Turnips
- Zucchinis
- Artichokes
- Chickpeas
- Butter
- Salt, pepper

PREPARATION

Brown the meat with the onions, salt, pepper, and butter. Cover with water and let cook for 45 minutes to 1 hour.
Then add the chickpeas and vegetables according to their cooking time.
Remove the meat, then place the pasta in the top of the couscoussier to steam.
Pour the sauce into another container, then return the pasta with the vegetables and a little sauce to finish cooking. Serve piping hot.

The Sfiriya

An old Constantinian dish, *sfiriya* (سفيرية) is a preparation made with shredded chicken, bread, eggs, and parsley, shaped into small balls.

INGREDIENTS

- Chicken
- Grated onions
- Salt and pepper
- Butter
- Stale bread
- Breadcrumbs
- 3 or 4 eggs
- Parsley

PREPARATION

Brown the chicken with the onions, salt, pepper, and butter. Add a little water and let it cook.

Remove the meat, shred it, then mix it with soaked stale bread, breadcrumbs, beaten eggs, and chopped parsley.

Adjust the seasoning if needed. Shape into balls, fry them in a pan with a little oil, then return them to the sauce to warm through before serving.

The Khadid

Khadid (خديد) is lamb meat dried in the sun, salted, and preserved for the winter months.

INGREDIENTS

- Lamb chops or pieces
- Coarse salt
- Olive oil

PREPARATION

Generously salt the meat and let it dry for several days in the sun. Once dried, store it in earthen jars or in olive oil.

To prepare a couscous, cook the meat with water, without vegetables or chickpeas, and drizzle with milk at the end of cooking to soften the taste.

The Dfina

A slow-cooked dish from Constantine, *dfina* (دفينة) brings together meat, chickpeas, and dried vegetables simmered gently over low heat. Enhanced with garlic, paprika, and spinach sautéed in olive oil, it offers a deep and generous sauce that embodies the cuisine of patience and sharing.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 crushed garlic cloves
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 500 g meat (lamb or beef)
- 200 g chickpeas soaked overnight
- 200 g white beans soaked overnight
- 200 g fresh spinach
- Water (enough to cover)

PREPARATION

Sauté the crushed garlic with salt, pepper, paprika, and a little olive oil, then add the meat and let it brown lightly.

Cover with water, add the soaked chickpeas and beans, and let simmer slowly over low heat until the meat and legumes are tender.

Separately, sauté the spinach in a drizzle of olive oil, then add it at the end of cooking to flavor and enrich the sauce.

Serve hot, accompanied by *kesra* bread to absorb all the flavor of this family dish.

The Tajine with Fava Beans, Potatoes, and Artichokes

This *tajine* (طاجين) combines fava beans, potatoes, and artichoke hearts in a sauce flavored with preserved lemon.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 onions
- 1.5 kg lamb
- Fresh fava beans
- Artichoke hearts
- Potatoes
- Parsley or coriander
- 2 preserved lemons

PREPARATION

Sauté the sliced onions in a little olive oil.
Add the meat, salt, and pepper, and brown well. Pour in 25 cl of water, then add the artichoke hearts, potatoes, and chopped preserved lemons.

Let simmer over low heat. Toward the end of cooking, add the fava beans and the parsley or coriander, then let cook a few more minutes before serving.

The Red Soup

Chorba hamra (شوربة حمراء), known as red soup, is a family chorba flavored with vegetables, tomato, and meatballs.

INGREDIENTS

- ½ chicken or lamb chops
- 300 g ground veal
- 3 large onions
- 3 carrots
- 3 turnips
- 1 stalk of celery
- ½ kg tomatoes
- 100 g frik (or freekeh or farik)
- Butter
- Salt, pepper, paprika
- 1 bunch parsley

PREPARATION

In a pot, melt a piece of butter and add the chicken leg (or lamb). Brown it until well golden. Add the grated onions and cook until they soften. Pour in 1.5 liters of water, then add the carrots, turnips, tomatoes, celery, and one spoonful of paprika. Season with salt and pepper and let cook.

Prepare small meatballs with the ground veal, grated onion, and salt, then add them to the pot. Continue cooking.

When the meat is almost done, add the frik to the broth and let it cook through. (If unavailable, the frik can be replaced with small pasta such as orzo.)

Check the seasoning before removing from the heat. Before serving hot, sprinkle with chopped parsley.

The White Soup

Chorba bayda (شربة بيضاء), known as white soup, is a traditional Constantinian soup, light and fragrant. Prepared with chicken, rice, and lemon, it is distinguished by its delicacy and fresh taste. Often served during Ramadan or at family meals, it brings warmth and comfort without heaviness.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 chicken leg
- 300 g ground veal
- 1 large onion
- 3 carrots
- 3 turnips
- 1 stalk of celery
- 100 g rice
- Butter
- Salt, pepper
- 2 eggs
- 1 lemon
- 1 bunch parsley

PREPARATION

In a pot, melt a piece of butter and add the chicken leg. Brown it until well golden. Add the grated onions and cook until they soften. Pour in 1.5 liters of water, then add the carrots, turnips, and celery. Season with salt and pepper and let cook.

Prepare small meatballs with the ground veal, grated onion, and salt, then add them to the pot. Continue cooking.

When the meat is almost cooked, add the rice to the broth and continue cooking for about 10 minutes. Check the seasoning and remove from the heat.

Just before serving, separate the egg whites from the yolks. Beat the yolks with the lemon juice, pour this preparation into the soup tureen, and sprinkle with chopped parsley.

Serve piping hot.

The Red Potatoes

A simple, family-style stew, *batata hamra* (بطاطا حمراء) takes its name from the fragrant tomato sauce that coats the vegetables and meat.

INGREDIENTS

- ½ kg leg of lamb
- 1 kg potatoes
- 2 large onions
- 2 cloves of garlic
- ½ kg tomatoes
- Butter
- Salt, pepper, paprika

PREPARATION

In a pot, place the meat cut into pieces with the grated onions, crushed garlic, a piece of butter, salt, and pepper.
Sauté for a few minutes, then add the paprika.

Peel the potatoes, cut them into quarters, and add them to the pot.
When the meat begins to cook, add the tomatoes reduced to a purée or passed through a food mill, then let simmer until fully cooked.

Finish by adding chopped parsley.

The Constantinian Chakhchoukha

An ancient festive dish, the Constantinian *chakhchoukha* (شخشوخة) is prepared with finely crumbled flatbreads, soaked in a generous red sauce with meat and chickpeas. Served for Eid or weddings, it embodies the conviviality and richness of the family table.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g thin flatbreads (*rougag* or dried *msemen*)
- 500 g lamb or beef
- 200 g chickpeas soaked overnight
- 3 ripe tomatoes (or 200 g tomato paste)
- 2 onions
- 2 carrots
- 1 zucchini
- 2 cloves garlic
- Paprika, black pepper, salt
- ½ teaspoon *ras el hanout* (optional)
- 3 tablespoons oil + 30 g butter

PREPARATION

Begin by crumbling the flatbreads into small, even pieces in a large dish, then cover them with a clean cloth to keep them from drying out.

In a large pot, sauté the meat cut into pieces with the grated onion, crushed garlic, oil, and butter. Season with salt, pepper, paprika, and optionally *ras el hanout*. When the meat is lightly browned, add the blended tomatoes (or the paste) and mix well until you obtain a smooth sauce.

Pour in enough water to cover, add the soaked chickpeas, and let simmer gently for about forty minutes. Then add the carrots and zucchini cut into pieces. Continue cooking over low heat until the meat is tender and the sauce is well thickened.

At serving time, pour part of the hot sauce over the crumbled flatbreads, mixing gently so they absorb the sauce without falling apart. Arrange in a large serving dish, place the meat and chickpeas in the center, then drizzle with a bit more sauce.

The Constantinian Dolma

Dolma (دولمة) brings together vegetables stuffed with ground meat, simmered in a sauce scented with cinnamon. Delicate and flavorful, it is one of the most cherished specialties of festive meals.

INGREDIENTS

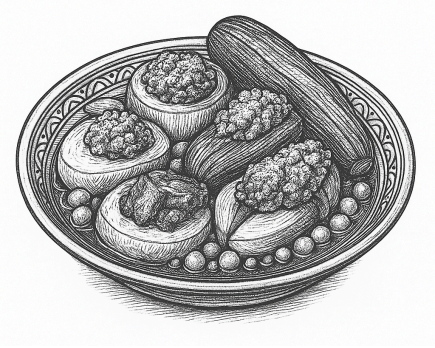
- 500 g ground meat (lamb or beef)
- 2 potatoes
- 2 zucchinis
- 2 artichoke hearts
- 1 onion
- 2 cloves garlic
- 100 g chickpeas soaked
- 2 eggs
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- Salt, pepper
- Oil + 30 g butter

PREPARATION

Prepare the stuffing: mix the ground meat with the grated onion, crushed garlic, chopped parsley, beaten eggs, salt, pepper, and cinnamon.
Slightly hollow out the potatoes, zucchinis, and artichoke hearts to create cavities. Generously stuff them with the meat mixture.

In a pot, sauté a little grated onion in a mixture of oil and butter. Add the chickpeas, then carefully arrange the stuffed vegetables so as not to break them. Pour in enough hot water to cover, then cover the pot and let simmer over low heat.

The vegetables should be tender and the sauce reduced to a slightly coating consistency. Serve piping hot, garnished with freshly chopped parsley.



The Mtewem

A refined and festive dish, *mtewem* (مثوم) is made of ground meatballs and almonds, simmered in a white sauce flavored with garlic. Often served at weddings, it symbolizes the elegance of urban cuisine.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g ground meat
- 250 g blanched almonds
- 1 onion
- 4 cloves garlic
- 3 eggs
- Salt, pepper
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 3 tablespoons oil
- 30 g butter

PREPARATION

In a large bowl, mix the ground meat with the grated onion, salt, pepper, and one beaten egg. Shape into small, even meatballs.

In a pot, heat the oil and butter, add the crushed garlic, and let it turn just golden. Add a large glass of water, season with salt, pepper, and cinnamon.
When the water begins to simmer, gently place the meatballs in and let them cook slowly over low heat.

Separately, lightly brown the almonds in a little butter, then add them to the sauce.
At the end of cooking, beat the two remaining eggs and slowly pour them in a thin stream into the pot, stirring lightly to bind the sauce. Serve hot, sprinkled with a few whole almonds.

The Chorba Frik

An essential Ramadan soup in Constantine, *chorba frik* (شربة فريك) is prepared with cracked green wheat and a tomato base flavored with herbs. Nourishing and aromatic, it brings the family together around the table for *ftour*.

INGREDIENTS

- 300 g lamb (with bone)
- 1 onion
- 2 ripe tomatoes
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 stalk celery
- 200 g chickpeas soaked
- ½ glass frik (cracked green wheat)
- 2 tablespoons oil
- Salt, pepper, paprika
- Fresh parsley or coriander

PREPARATION

Place the meat cut into pieces in a pot with the grated onion, oil, salt, pepper, and paprika. Sauté for a few minutes, then add the blended tomatoes and the tomato paste. Mix well until the sauce takes on a nice red color.

Add hot water, the chickpeas, and the celery stalk. Cover and let cook over medium heat for a good half hour.

When the meat is almost done, add the frik, mix well, and continue cooking, stirring from time to time so the soup thickens gently without sticking.

Serve hot, garnished with chopped coriander or parsley.

The Stew of Fresh White Beans

The stew of fresh white beans, or *loubya bayda chtetha* (لوبيا بيضا شطّطة), is a generous dish from the family kitchens of Constantine. Slowly simmered with meat and seasonal vegetables, it brings to the table a rich and comforting sauce, carrying the simple and genuine taste of meals from the past.

INGREDIENTS

- 600 g lamb (shoulder with bone)
- 3 onions
- 3 tomatoes
- 1 carrot
- 1 kg fresh white beans (shelled)
- 3 tablespoons oil
- Salt, pepper

PREPARATION

Shell the beans, clean and slice the onions, peel the tomatoes and cut them into pieces. (To make peeling easier, plunge the tomatoes into boiling water for 3 minutes, remove them, and place them in cold water before removing the skin.)

Place the meat cut into pieces in a sauté pan with 3 tablespoons of olive oil, two sliced onions, and a few pieces of tomato. Sauté for a few minutes until the meat is well browned. Cover with water, add the carrot cut into small pieces, season with salt and pepper. Let simmer over low heat.

Place the beans in a cast-iron pot, cover with water, add the tomato pieces, and cook over medium heat until the beans are almost done. (Do not add salt at the beginning of cooking.) Check regularly and add more water if necessary.

When they are nearly cooked, remove the pieces of meat from the sauté pan and add them to the beans in the pot. Salt and pepper the mixture, add water or the meat cooking juices if needed, and finish cooking the beans over low heat.

Serve piping hot in a deep dish.

The Cauliflower Gratin

Cauliflower gratin (غراتان القرنبيط) is a simple and flavorful everyday dish. Lightly seasoned and browned in the oven, it combines the tenderness of cauliflower with the warmth of eggs and butter, recalling the conviviality of family tables.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 large cauliflower
- 2 or 3 eggs
- Salt, pepper, paprika
- 1 piece of butter

PREPARATION

Clean the cauliflower, separate the florets, and cook them by steaming or in boiling water for 7 to 10 minutes.

Gently place the florets in an attractive ovenproof gratin dish. Season with salt and pepper. Sprinkle with paprika. Break the eggs into a bowl, beat them lightly, and pour over the florets. Place in a hot oven to brown for 10 minutes and serve piping hot straight from the oven.

2. The Warm Bread from Her Hands

The flatbreads and leavened breads, the smell of cooking and the warmth of home

The “Kesra” Flatbread

An indispensable companion of daily life, *kesra* (كسرة) is a semolina flatbread cooked on the *tajine*, whose lightly toasted aroma evokes the simplicity and generosity of shared meals. Whether thin and supple, *kesra rakhsis* (كسرة رَخسيس), or thicker and leavened, *kesra matlou'* (كسرة مطلوع), it remains the living bread of Constantine.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g fine semolina
- 1 tablespoon yeast
- 2 tablespoons oil (not olive)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds
- 150 g softened butter

PREPARATION

Mix the semolina, salt, sesame seeds, oil, and butter by hand. Make a well in the center of the mixture and place the yeast with a little warm water.

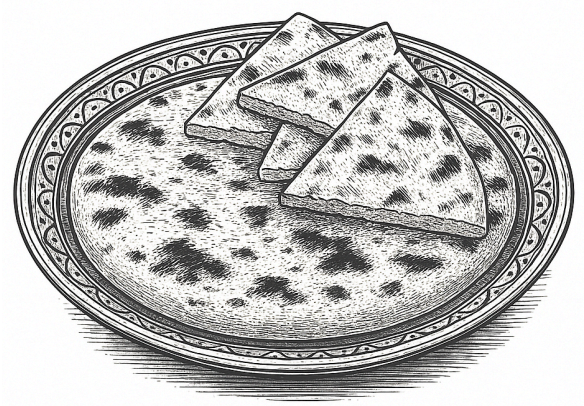
Break up and dissolve the yeast, then mix everything together, gradually adding water until the dough forms a ball (but not too soft).

Knead on a board, adding a little butter toward the end. Shape into a ball and let the semolina rest. Heat a heavy pan.

Flatten the dough into a round flatbread, lower the heat, and place the flatbread in the pan.

When the first side begins to rise, prick it with a matchstick or fork.

Once the first side is cooked through in the middle, flip the flatbread. Using a cloth, turn the bread in circles until it is cooked. Let cool on the side before serving.



The Chrik Buns

A true specialty of Constantine, *chrik* (شريك) are soft little brioches flavored with orange blossom water and sometimes decorated with sesame seeds. Traditionally served for Eid, they accompany coffee with milk or tea, recalling the sweetness of festive mornings and the warmth of family evenings.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g fine semolina
- 2 teaspoons sesame seeds
- 2 eggs
- 3 tablespoons oil
- 30 g yeast
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 50 g butter
- Orange blossom water

PREPARATION

In a bowl, mix the semolina, salt, and sesame seeds, then make a well in the center. Pour in the oil and butter and mix well. Make another well, add the yeast with warm water, and mix. Add more water as needed and knead.

Break in one egg and continue kneading. Shape the dough into a ball, butter a baking dish, form the buns, and let them rise.
Preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C).

When the buns have risen, brush them with a beaten egg and bake until golden.

The Matlouh

Matlouh (مطلوع) is a round leavened bread, made with semolina and flour, cooked on a hot surface.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon baker's yeast
- ½ glass warm water
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- Flour
- Fine semolina
- Salt
- Water

PREPARATION

Mix the flour, semolina, and salt in a large bowl. Add the yeast dissolved in warm water with the sugar, then gradually incorporate the remaining water to obtain a soft dough.

Knead vigorously, then cover with a cloth and let rise.

Form small balls, flatten them slightly, then cook on a hot surface (tajine or heavy pan), turning them until nicely golden.

The Brioches of Mamou

Soft and fragrant, **the brioches of Mamou** stand out for the use of sweetened condensed milk, which gives them a tender texture.

INGREDIENTS

- 1.5 kg flour
- 1 glass neutral oil
- Salt
- Baker's yeast
- 30 cl sweetened condensed milk
- 3 eggs

PREPARATION

Put the flour and oil in a bowl with the salt. Dilute the condensed milk with ½ liter of water, then add it to the flour and knead.

Dissolve the yeast in a little warm water, incorporate it into the dough, then add the eggs and work well until you obtain a soft dough.

Place on a baking tray, let rise, then brush with egg yolk and sprinkle with crushed sugar. Bake until the brioches are golden.

3. The Starters She Prepared in Secret

The surprise dishes that opened the meal, often with a mischievous smile

The Mamounette Meat Pie

A unique family heritage, *torta bel-lham* (تورتة باللحم) combines a golden crust with a fragrant filling of meat, eggs, and mushrooms. Served at festive meals.

INGREDIENTS

- Puff pastry (2 portions)
- 250 g veal
- 250 g beef
- 100 g button mushrooms
- 2 onions and Gruyère cheese
- 3 eggs + 2 eggs
- 1 bunch flat-leaf parsley
- Salt and pepper
- 10 g butter

PREPARATION

The Filling:

Place the meat in a pan and cover it with beef broth, or with cold water to which you add a beef bouillon cube. Break it apart with a spoon.

Grate the onion, add it to the meat with salt, pepper, and butter, and heat. When the water boils, cover the pan, reduce the heat, and let simmer until the liquid has completely evaporated. (Do not let the meat dry out.)

Break one egg into a bowl, chop the parsley, sauté the mushrooms in butter, then add them to the mixture and combine. Prepare 3 fried eggs or an omelet, cut them into pieces, and set aside.

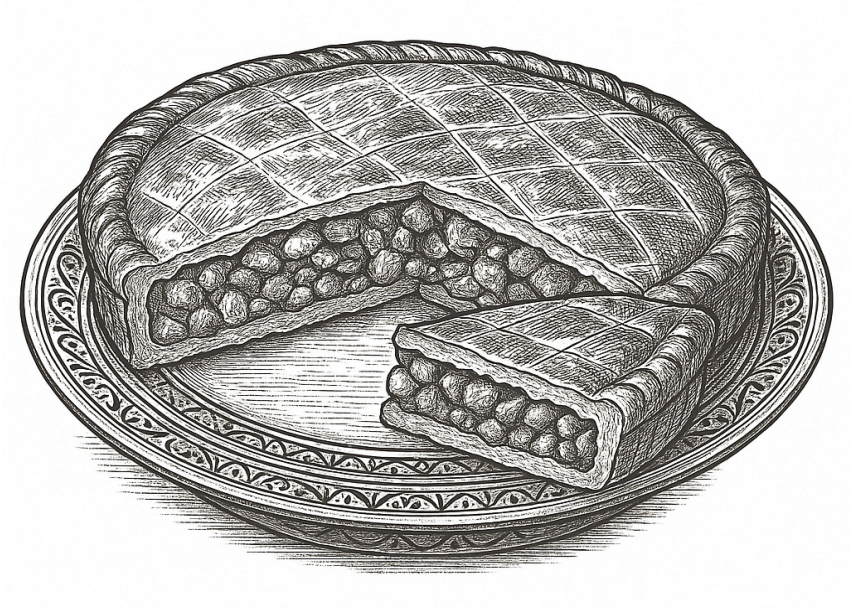
The Pie:

With a rolling pin, roll out half of the puff pastry and place it in a buttered dish. Prick it with a fork and brush with egg yolk.

Sprinkle Gruyère cheese over the pastry, spread the filling on top, then distribute the egg pieces (from the fried eggs or omelet) over it. Add a bit more Gruyère. With a rolling pin, roll out the rest of the puff pastry and cover the pie. Seal the edges of the two pastry layers by moistening with a little water and pressing them carefully

together with your fingers. Brush the puff pastry with egg yolk, then make a small hole in the center.

Preheat your oven to 250°C and bake. After 10 minutes, reduce the temperature to 200°C and continue baking until golden brown.
Serve with lemon wedges and a green salad.



The Potato Terrine

A cold and flavorful starter, the potato terrine (ترين البطاطا) combines steamed vegetables, flaked tuna, and hard-boiled eggs, enhanced with fresh parsley. Set in a mold, it takes on an elegant shape that makes it ideal for festive meals or buffets, served with smooth mayonnaise on the side.

INGREDIENTS

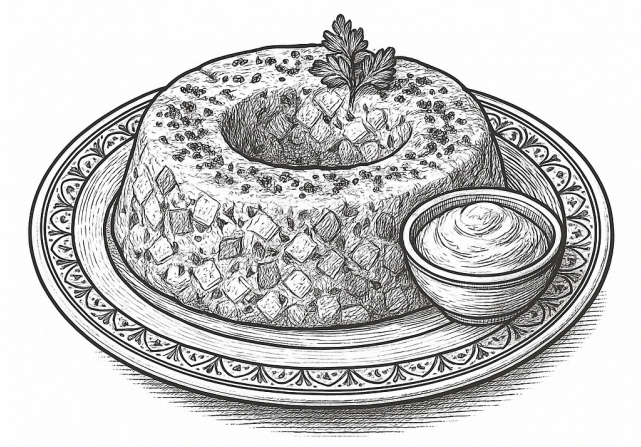
- 500 g firm-flesh potatoes
- 1 can tuna in water
- 3 hard-boiled eggs
- Mayonnaise
- Fresh flat-leaf parsley
- Salt and pepper

PREPARATION

Steam or boil the potatoes until tender, then cut them into pieces. Once cooled, mix them with the flaked tuna and the hard-boiled eggs cut into pieces. Season with salt and pepper, and sprinkle with chopped flat-leaf parsley.

Pour the mixture into a very lightly oiled mold, press down, and refrigerate for a few hours. (This can be prepared the day before to be served the next day.)

Unmold carefully onto a serving dish just before serving.
Serve with mayonnaise on the side.



The Carrot Salad with Cumin

Carrot salad with cumin, *zrodiya b'l kemmoun* (زرودية بالكمون), is a simple and fragrant starter. Fresh and light, it blends the sweetness of cooked carrots with the warm aroma of cumin, to accompany bread and family dishes.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 kg carrots
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 cloves garlic
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- Salt, pepper
- Fresh parsley or coriander

PREPARATION

Wash and peel the carrots, then cut them into slices or small pieces. Cook them by steaming or in boiling water. Once cooked, drain and refrigerate.

Before serving, mix in the bottom of a salad bowl the crushed garlic, olive oil, cumin, salt, and pepper. Add the carrots and mix well. Check the seasoning and adjust with more cumin, salt, or pepper to taste.

Serve cold, garnished with chopped coriander or parsley.

Note: the same preparation can be made with chickpeas.

The Bourek

A staple of Constantinian tables, *bourek bel-lham* (بوراك باللحم) combine a thin, crispy pastry with a generous filling of meat, onions, and fragrant herbs. Served golden and hot, they accompany both chorbas and festive meals, offering a balance between lightness and indulgence.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g ground meat (lamb, beef, or veal)
- 1 medium onion
- 2 cloves garlic
- 2 tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 2 tablespoons fresh coriander
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon mild paprika
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 egg
- 8 sheets of bourek pastry (*d'youl* or brick sheets)
- Oil for frying

PREPARATION

The Filling

In a pan, sauté the grated onion in two tablespoons of olive oil. Add the ground meat, crushed garlic, and a glass of water. Season with salt, pepper, paprika, and cinnamon, then cook until the water has evaporated (about 10 minutes).

Remove from the heat, add the parsley, coriander, and the beaten egg to bind the filling. Mix well and let cool.

The Bourek

Lay out a sheet of brick pastry and place a spoonful of filling near the edge closest to you.

Fold the two opposite sides, left and right, over the filling to form a rectangle.

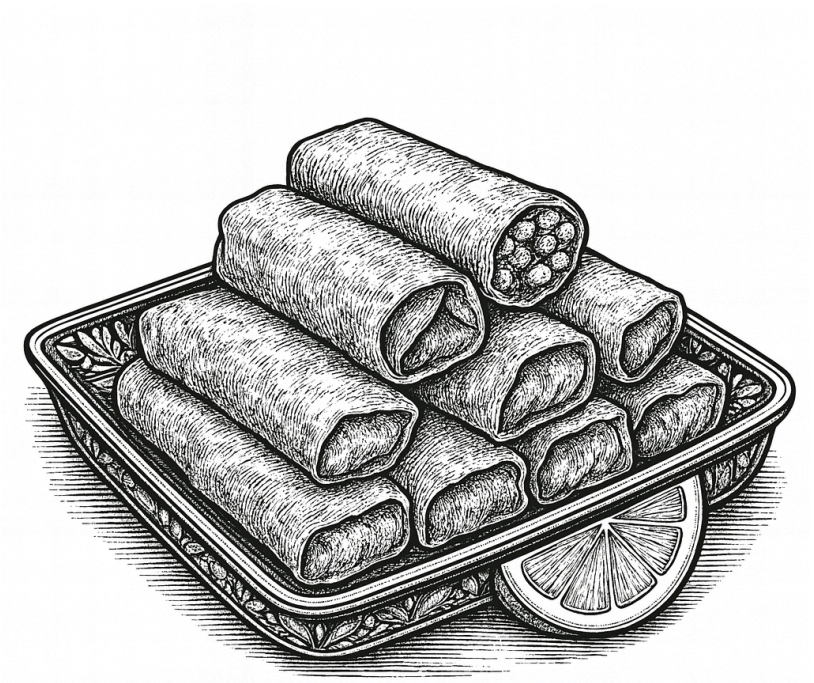
Roll the pastry like a cigar, starting from the edge closest to you that contains the filling, and seal the edges well, moistening with a little water if necessary.

Place on a tray.

Repeat the process with the other pastry sheets to make the desired number of bourek.

Fry the rolls in moderately hot oil (peanut oil or similar) until golden and crispy on both sides. Drain on absorbent paper.

Serve hot, accompanied by lemon wedges and a green salad, to enjoy the authentic taste of Constantinian meals.



The Zroudia Mchermla

A simple and sun-filled starter, *zroudia mchermla* (زرودية مشرملة) is a Constantinian-style carrot salad. Cooked just until tender, then coated with olive oil, cumin, garlic, and lemon juice, it brings freshness and fragrance to the beginning of the meal. An everyday dish, yet also a discreet companion of large family tables, *zroudia mchermla* is enjoyed warm or cold, always with a piece of *kesra* for dipping.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g fresh carrots
- 2 cloves garlic
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- Juice of 1 lemon
- Salt to taste
- Fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)

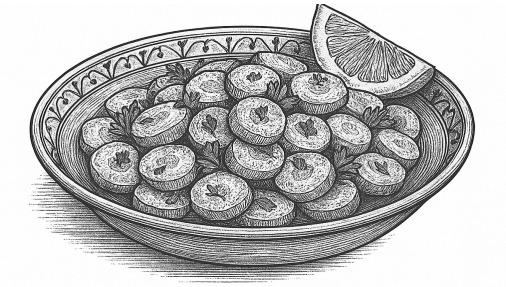
PREPARATION

Peel the carrots and cut them into even pieces.
Cook them in salted boiling water until tender but still firm. Drain and let cool slightly.

In a large dish, crush the garlic in a mortar with the cumin and a pinch of salt. Add the olive oil and lemon juice, mixing well to obtain a fragrant sauce.

Pour this marinade over the still-warm carrots, mixing gently to coat them well. Let rest a few minutes before serving so the flavors blend.

Sprinkle with chopped parsley when plating, if desired.



4. The Sweet Treats We Always Waited For

The cakes and pastries she offered to reward and bring everyone together

The Kaak Rings

An emblematic pastry of Constantine, *kaâk* (كعك) is a ring-shaped treat flavored with anise and vanilla, sprinkled with almonds. Light and crisp, it is enjoyed at breakfast, with afternoon tea, or during festive occasions, accompanied by coffee or tea.

INGREDIENTS

- 750 g flour
- 1 glass oil
- 1 packet baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- Sugar (to taste, about 200 g)
- 2 eggs
- 1 packet vanilla sugar
- 1 teaspoon anise seeds
- Pine nuts or almonds

PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F). In a saucepan, melt the sugar with a little water, the anise, and the vanilla sugar to obtain a fragrant syrup.

In a mixing bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, and salt. Add the oil and rub it lightly into the dough, then gradually pour in the hot syrup while stirring. Incorporate the beaten eggs and knead until you obtain a soft but non-sticky dough.

Shape the dough into rolls and join the ends to form small rings. Brush with a little melted butter or beaten egg, then sprinkle with pine nuts or almonds.

Place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and bake for about 25 minutes, until golden and slightly crisp.

The Constantinian Baklawa

A refined pastry for grand celebrations, the Constantinian *baklawa* (بقلاوة) is made of thin layers of buttered pastry filled with crushed almonds, scented with cinnamon and orange blossom water. Baked to a golden finish and drizzled with warm honey, it embodies the elegance and generosity of Constantine's traditional pastry-making.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g blanched and crushed almonds
- 250 g powdered sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 500 g pastry sheets
- 250 g melted butter
- 1 tablespoon orange blossom water
- 300 g honey

PREPARATION

Butter a large rectangular dish and line the bottom with several sheets of pastry, each brushed with melted butter. Once the base is well formed, cover it with the mixture of crushed almonds, sugar, and cinnamon, lightly scented with a dash of orange blossom water.

Then layer more pastry sheets on top, each one brushed with butter, to enclose the filling in a golden, flaky shell. With a sharp knife, score neat diamond or square shapes, without cutting all the way through, to make slicing easier after baking.

Place the preparation in a hot oven at 180°C (350°F) and bake gently until the surface is beautifully golden and crisp.

As soon as it comes out of the oven, pour warm, fragrant honey over the pastry, letting it seep into every layer and crevice. Allow it to rest and soak before presenting the baklawa, cut into delicate pieces, glistening and generous.

The Griwech

A traditional Constantinian pastry of Algerian cuisine, *griwech* (قريوش) is a crisp dough flavored with orange blossom water, fried until golden, then coated in honey or sprinkled with powdered sugar.

INGREDIENTS

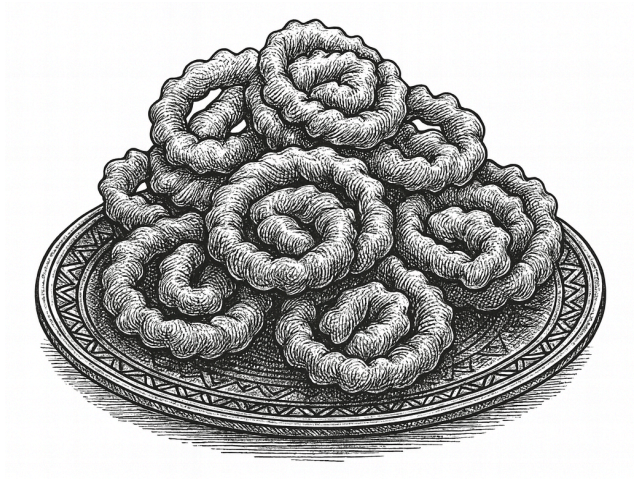
- 1 kg flour
- 300 g butter
- 1 egg
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 packet yeast
- 1 tablespoon vinegar
- 1 tablespoon orange blossom water
- 1 pinch salt

PREPARATION

Mix the flour with a ladle of melted butter, salt, sugar, and yeast. Add the egg, vinegar, and orange blossom water, then knead while adding a little cold water until you obtain a soft dough.

Divide into 4 balls and let rest for 10 minutes. Roll out, cut, and shape the *griwech* by pinching the strips.

Fry in hot oil until golden brown. Then dip in warm honey or sprinkle with powdered sugar before serving.



The Sfenj

Sfenj (سفنج) are light and crispy doughnuts, fried in oil and often sprinkled with powdered sugar or dipped in honey.

INGREDIENTS

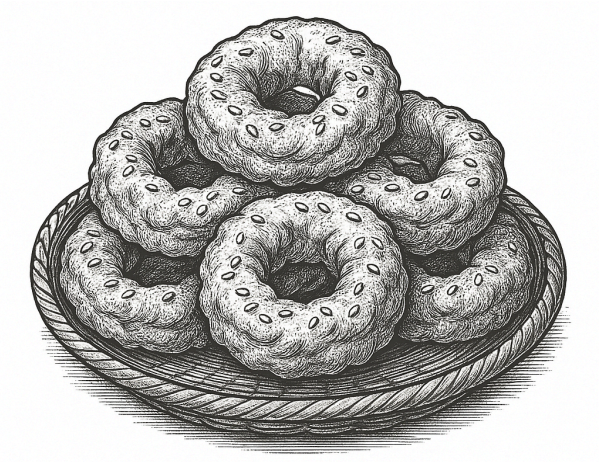
- 1 kg fine semolina
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 cube fresh yeast
- Sesame seeds
- Lukewarm water

PREPARATION

Mix the semolina with the salt and sesame seeds, add the yeast dissolved in a little lukewarm water, then knead while gradually adding more water until you obtain a very soft dough. Let rise until the dough doubles in size.

Heat oil in a large pan, shape the dough into rings, and drop them into the hot oil until golden.

Drain on absorbent paper and serve with powdered sugar, honey, or plain.



The Chocolate Fondant

A modern treat adopted into family cooking, the chocolate fondant brings a contemporary touch to festive meals. Behind its apparent simplicity, it hides a rich, molten heart, extending ancestral know-how with a sweet and refined note.

INGREDIENTS

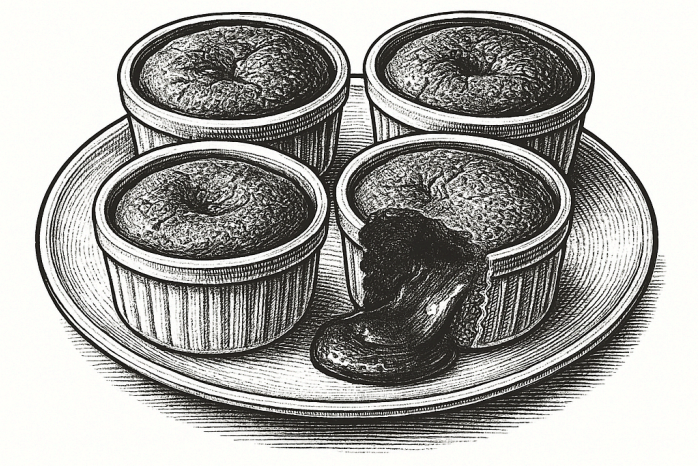
- 100 g baking chocolate
- 8 squares of chocolate (white, milk, or dark, as desired)
- 3 eggs
- 60 g butter
- 20 g flour
- 80 g sugar

PREPARATION

Preheat the oven to 250°C (Thermostat 8).
Melt the 100 g of chocolate and add the butter, stirring until smooth.

In a separate bowl, mix the eggs, sugar, and flour. Then add the chocolate–butter mixture.

Pour the preparation one-third of the way up the ramekins, place 2 squares of chocolate in each, and fill the rest of the ramekin with the preparation.
Bake for 10 minutes, 15 minutes maximum.



The Biscuit of Savoy

The biscuit of Savoy is a light and airy cake with a tender crumb, often prepared for family celebrations.

INGREDIENTS

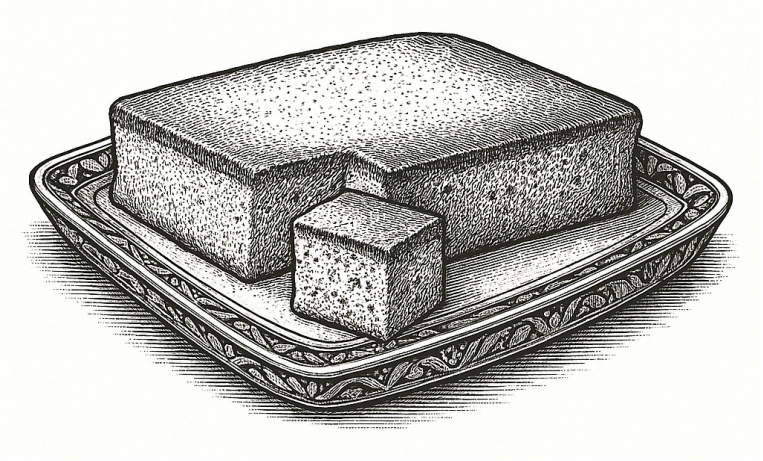
- 2 glasses powdered sugar
- 6 eggs
- 1 packet vanilla sugar
- 1 pinch salt
- 1 glass flour
- ½ glass potato starch
- 1 packet baking powder

PREPARATION

Separate the egg yolks from the whites. Beat the yolks with the powdered sugar, vanilla, and salt until the mixture becomes pale.

Add the flour, potato starch, and baking powder. Whip the egg whites until stiff and gently fold them into the mixture.

Pour into a buttered and floured mold, then bake at 160–180°C (Thermostat 5–6) until fully cooked. Sprinkle with powdered sugar before serving.



The Choux Pastry

Choux pastry is the base of many traditional pastries such as éclairs or filled cream puffs.

INGREDIENTS

- 75 g flour
- 35 g butter
- 8 tablespoons water
- 2 small eggs
- 1 pinch salt
- 1 sugar cube

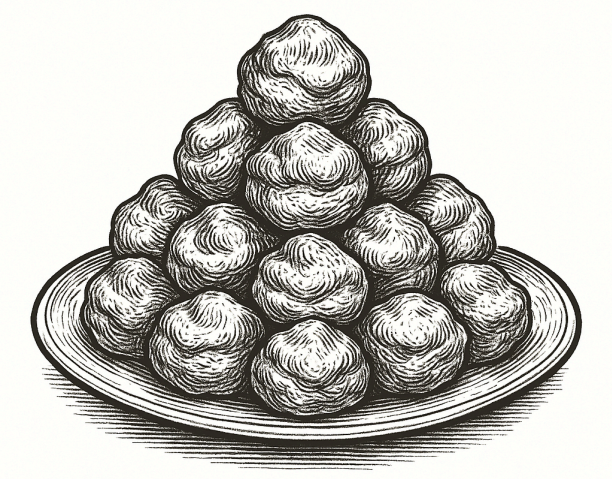
PREPARATION

Put the water, butter, salt, and sugar in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat, add the flour all at once, and stir vigorously.

Return to low heat and dry out the dough until it pulls away from the sides of the pan. Off the heat, incorporate the eggs one at a time, beating well until you obtain a smooth, supple dough.

Pipe or spoon onto a buttered baking sheet in small mounds or logs, depending on the desired shape. Bake in a moderate oven, without opening the door for the first 15 minutes.

Remove when the pastry resists gentle finger pressure.



The Hazelnut Cake

Soft and fragrant, the hazelnut cake combines the richness of ground hazelnuts with the aroma of rum.

INGREDIENTS

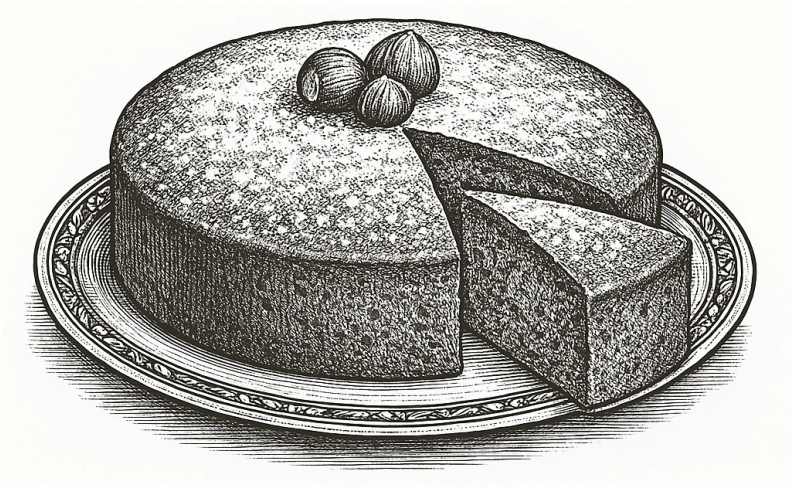
- 125 g ground hazelnuts
- 125 g powdered sugar
- 3 eggs
- ½ cup crème fraîche
- ½ dl rum
- 25 g starch
- 7 g baking powder
- Powdered sugar

PREPARATION

Beat the sugar with the egg yolks. Add the ground hazelnuts, crème fraîche, rum, starch, and baking powder.

Then fold in the egg whites beaten until stiff.
Mix gently and pour into a buttered mold lined with parchment paper.

Bake in the oven for about 35 minutes. Let cool before sprinkling with powdered sugar.



The Baghrir Crêpes

Baghrir (بغرير) are light and spongy crêpes, famous for their surface dotted with tiny holes (known as "thousand-hole crêpes"). Made with fine semolina, they are enjoyed throughout the Maghreb, often drizzled with a mixture of melted butter and honey.

INGREDIENTS

- 250 g fine semolina
- 50 g flour
- 1 packet dry baker's yeast (or 20 g fresh)
- 1 packet baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 500 ml lukewarm water (adjust as needed for texture)

PREPARATION

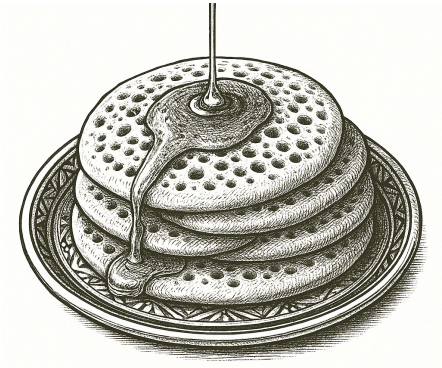
Place the semolina, flour, salt, baker's yeast, and baking powder in a bowl. Gradually pour in the lukewarm water while blending (with a blender or hand mixer) until you obtain a smooth, fluid batter without lumps.

Cover and let rest for 30 to 40 minutes, until bubbles form on the surface. Heat a non-stick pan over medium heat. Pour in a small ladle of batter and cook without flipping.

Many holes will form on the surface: the crêpe is ready when the batter is no longer wet. Repeat until all the batter is used up.

Arrange the *baghrir* on a dish, drizzle generously with melted butter and honey. They can also be enjoyed with jam or almond paste.

They should be eaten warm and soft, and should never be crispy.



The Tamina

In Constantine, *Tamina* (تَمينة) is an essential sweet for the Mouloud and for births. Made with toasted semolina, melted butter, and honey, it is distinguished by its soft texture and warm fragrance. Its simple yet symbolic preparation makes it a dish of sharing and celebration, offered to family and guests on special occasions.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g medium durum wheat semolina
- 200 g butter
- 250 g honey (adjust to taste)
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon for decoration
- (Optional) Almonds or pine nuts for garnish

PREPARATION

Place the semolina in a large heavy pan and toast it over low heat, stirring constantly, until it turns golden and releases a nutty aroma.

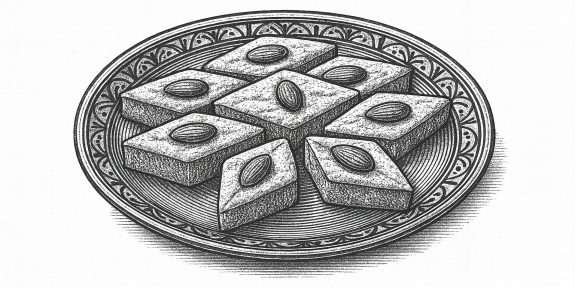
In a saucepan, gently melt the butter with the honey.

Pour the butter–honey mixture over the hot semolina. Stir vigorously to obtain a smooth mixture, neither too dry nor too liquid.

Transfer the preparation to a dish and smooth the surface with a spatula or the back of a spoon.

Decorate by sprinkling with cinnamon, sometimes tracing geometric patterns. Add a few whole almonds or pine nuts in the center for a refined touch.

Serve warm or at room temperature, cut into diamonds or slices.



The Chickpeas with Honey

Ḥimṣ b'asla (حمص بعسلة) is the emblematic dish of the Mouloud in Constantine. Chickpeas, slowly cooked, are mashed and mixed with honey, sometimes enhanced with a touch of cinnamon. A simple yet heartfelt sweetness, it is always served with *tiboujajine* flatbreads, as part of a ritual of family conviviality.

INGREDIENTS

- 250 g dried chickpeas (or 500 g cooked)
- 3 to 4 tbsp honey (adjust to taste)
- 1 pinch cinnamon (optional)
- 1 to 2 tbsp olive oil (optional, for smoothness)
- 1 pinch salt

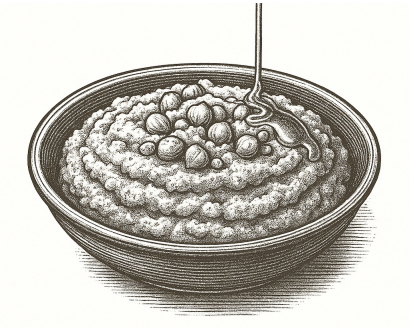
PREPARATION

Soak the chickpeas overnight in cold water. The next day, cook them in a large pot of water until very tender. Drain, keeping a little of the cooking liquid.

Mash the warm chickpeas with a mortar or fork. Add a drizzle of olive oil if desired.

Gradually incorporate the honey until you obtain a soft, sweet paste. Optionally add a pinch of cinnamon.

Serve in individual bowls, warm or at room temperature, drizzled with an extra thread of honey. Always accompany with *tiboujajine* flatbreads.



The Tiboujajine

Tuboujajine (تبوجاجين), sometimes called *tibouhjajin*, are thick semolina flatbreads cooked on a cast-iron or clay *tajine*. In Constantine, they are inseparable from the Mouloud and are enjoyed with *ḥimṣ bʿasla*. Soft at the center and slightly grilled on the surface, they represent Constantine's festive bread par excellence.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g medium durum wheat semolina
- 1 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp oil (olive or neutral)
- Lukewarm water (about 250 ml, adjust as needed)
- (Optional) ½ tsp dry baker's yeast or 10 g fresh yeast

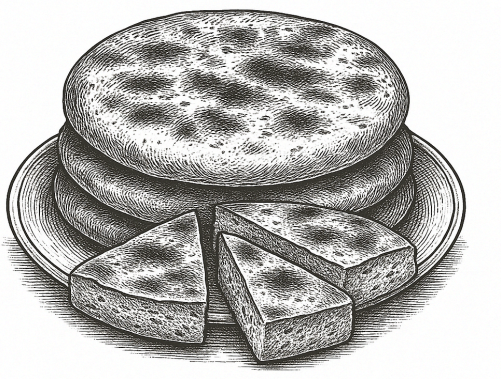
PREPARATION

Place the semolina in a bowl, add the salt and oil. Gradually pour in the lukewarm water, working the dough until it becomes soft and smooth.

Let rest for 30 minutes (or 1 hour if using yeast). Divide the dough into balls and flatten them into round flatbreads about 1 cm thick.

Heat a *tajine* (or a heavy skillet) and cook the flatbreads for a few minutes on each side, until golden and cooked through.

Keep the flatbreads under a clean cloth to preserve their softness. Serve hot, whole or in pieces, drizzled with honey or dipped into chickpeas with honey.



The Rhribia

Rhribia (الرخبية) is an ancient sweet from Constantine, prepared for the Mouloud and on special occasions. Unlike *Tamina*, which is made with semolina, *Rhribia* uses toasted flour, giving it a more intense flavor and a grainier texture. Mixed with melted butter and honey, it embodies the warm simplicity of Constantinian tables.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g wheat flour
- 200 g butter (or *smen* for more flavor)
- 250 g honey (adjust to taste)
- 1 pinch salt
- (Optional) 2 tbsp toasted sesame seeds or 1 tsp ground anise

PREPARATION

Place the flour in a large heavy pan. Toast it over low heat, stirring constantly, until it turns golden and releases a nutty aroma.

In a saucepan, gently melt the butter with the honey.
Pour the butter–honey mixture over the hot flour. Stir vigorously until you obtain a smooth, fragrant mixture with a slightly sandy texture.

Transfer to a dish, smooth the surface, and decorate with sesame seeds if desired.
Serve warm or at room temperature, cut into portions or scooped out with a spoon.

The Gazelle Horns

Constantinian *gazelle horns* (كعب الغزال) are delicate crescent-shaped pastries filled with almond paste flavored with orange blossom water. Tender and melt-in-the-mouth, they are served with coffee or mint tea during festivals, weddings, and Mouloud celebrations. In Constantine, they are sometimes dusted with powdered sugar, sometimes coated with a light, fragrant syrup.

INGREDIENTS

For the dough :

- 300 g flour
- 100 g melted butter
- 1 pinch salt
- Orange blossom water (as needed for the dough)

For the filling :

- 250 g blanched almonds, finely ground
- 120 g granulated sugar
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 3–4 tbsp orange blossom water

PREPARATION

Mix the flour, salt, and melted butter, then gradually add the orange blossom water to form a soft, smooth dough. Cover and let rest for 30 minutes. Prepare the filling by mixing the almonds, sugar, cinnamon, and orange blossom water until you obtain a firm almond paste.

Roll the dough out thinly with a rolling pin. Place small logs of almond filling on the dough and roll them up. Shape into crescents, gently pinching the ends. Arrange the gazelle horns on a buttered baking sheet or one lined with parchment paper. Bake in a moderate oven (180°C / 350°F) for 15–20 minutes, without letting them brown too much.

When out of the oven, there are two options: leave them plain as they are, or dip them quickly in a light orange blossom syrup and roll them in powdered sugar for a more festive version.

Serve the gazelle horns in paper cases. They are best enjoyed at room temperature with mint tea or black coffee. Their delicate almond and orange blossom flavor makes them one of the most refined sweets of Constantinian tables.

The Rice Cream

Constantinian rice cream (كريمة الأرز) is a smooth and velvety preparation, flavored with orange blossom water. Served during the Mouloud, to children, or to the sick, it is one of the comforting sweets of Constantine's culinary tradition. Today it is often prepared with powdered rice cream or rice semolina, to achieve a fine and homogeneous texture..

INGREDIENTS

- 100 g rice cream powder (or very fine rice semolina)
- 1 L whole milk
- 80 g sugar (adjust to taste)
- 1 tbsp orange blossom water
- (Optional) ground cinnamon or crushed pistachios for garnish

PREPARATION

Dissolve the rice cream in a little cold milk to avoid lumps.
Heat the remaining milk in a saucepan, then add the diluted rice cream.
Cook over low heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon until thickened. Add the sugar and orange blossom water at the end of cooking, mixing well.
Pour into individual cups and let cool slightly.

Decorate with ground cinnamon or crushed pistachios. Enjoy warm or cold as a light, fragrant dessert.

The Mabrouk

Mabrouk (مبروك) is a traditional Constantinian sweet, prepared especially during the Mouloud or to celebrate joyful events—as its name suggests, it accompanies wishes of blessing and prosperity (*mabrouk* meaning "blessed" or "congratulations"). It is a simple yet refined preparation made with toasted semolina, honey, and dried fruits, reminiscent of *tamina* but in a more festive and embellished version.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g medium semolina
- 200 g butter (or *smen* for more flavor)
- 250 g honey
- 100 g toasted crushed almonds
- 50 g crushed hazelnuts or walnuts (optional)
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 2–3 tbsp orange blossom water

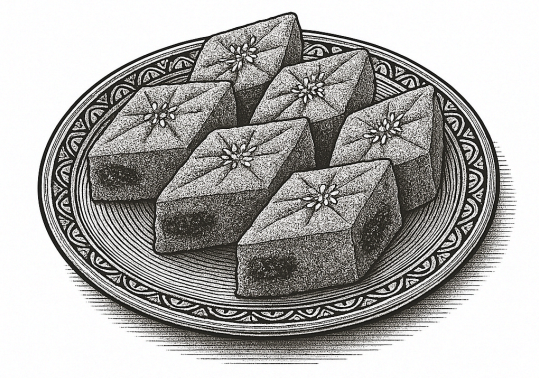
PREPARATION

Place the semolina in a large pan and toast it gently until it takes on a nice golden color and a nutty aroma.

Melt the butter in a saucepan, add the honey and a few spoonfuls of orange blossom water. Pour this hot mixture over the toasted semolina and mix well to obtain a smooth dough. Incorporate the crushed almonds and other nuts, then flavor with cinnamon.

Transfer to a dish, smooth the surface, and decorate with a few whole almonds or a dusting of cinnamon.

Cut into portions or serve with a spoon. *Mabrouk* (مبروك) is presented warm or at room temperature, always during a family or religious celebration, as a symbol of blessing and shared joy.



The Ghribiat el Warka

Ghribiat el Warka (غريبيات الورقة) are small Constantinian shortbread cookies, delicate and crumbly, that melt in the mouth. Their name comes from their light texture, like a *warka* (leaf). They are prepared with flour, sugar, and butter, sometimes enriched with almonds or sesame, and decorated with a touch of cinnamon. An essential sweet treat, they accompany coffee or tea during festive occasions.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g sifted flour
- 250 g powdered sugar
- 250 g melted butter (or smen for more flavor)
- 1 pinch salt
- 1 tsp vanilla or orange blossom water
- (Optional) 100 g almonds or toasted sesame seeds
- Ground cinnamon for decoration

PREPARATION

In a bowl, mix the melted butter with the powdered sugar until smooth and creamy.

Gradually add the flour, then the salt and the chosen flavoring (vanilla or orange blossom water).
Work the dough gently without over-kneading: it should remain soft and crumbly.
Shape into small balls and place them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

Flatten each ball slightly and sprinkle with a little cinnamon or decorate with an almond.

Bake at 160°C (th. 5) for 15–20 minutes, without letting them brown too much: the cookies should remain pale.

Serve the *Ghribiat el Warka* (غريبيات الورقة) in paper cases. They are enjoyed at room temperature, crumbly and melt-in-the-mouth, with tea or coffee.

The Zrir

A traditional sweet prepared for births, *zrira* (زريرة) comforts the mother and symbolizes blessing. It is made with toasted seeds, honey, and butter, giving it a rich and fragrant texture.

INGREDIENTS

- 250 g sesame seeds (or fenugreek, or a mix)
- 150 g toasted flour
- 150 g melted butter
- 200 g honey (adjust to taste)
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon

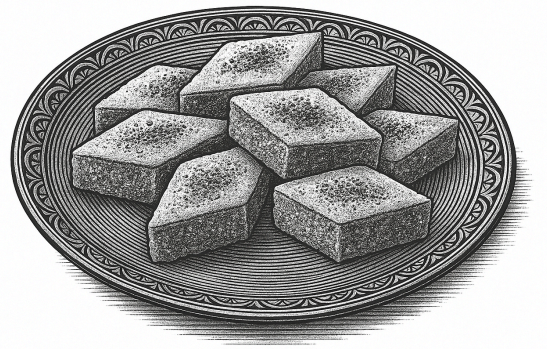
PREPARATION

Dry-roast the seeds in a pan until they release a pleasant aroma. Then grind the roasted seeds into a fine powder.

In a large pan, gently toast the flour until it turns golden. Mix this flour with the seed powder.

Melt the butter, stir in the honey, then pour this hot mixture over the powders. Mix quickly with a wooden spoon to obtain a smooth, fragrant paste.

Transfer to a dish, smooth the surface, and sprinkle with cinnamon. Serve warm or at room temperature, cut into diamond shapes.



The Makrout el louz

A refined pastry from Constantine, *makrout el louz* (مقروط اللوز) is an almond-based sweet coated in powdered sugar. Soft and melt-in-the-mouth, it is inseparable from weddings and grand celebrations.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 g blanched almonds, ground
- 250 g powdered sugar + extra for coating
- 2 eggs
- 1 packet vanilla
- Orange blossom water
- 200 g additional powdered sugar for rolling the pastries

PREPARATION

Mix the ground almonds with the powdered sugar and vanilla. Add the eggs one by one, then a few drops of orange blossom water, just enough to obtain a soft but non-sticky dough.

Shape the dough into even logs, cut into diamonds or rectangles. Arrange them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
Bake in a moderate oven (160–170°C / 320–340°F) until the pastries are just set, without browning. Let them cool completely.

Prepare a light syrup with water and sugar, quickly dip each *makrout* into it, then immediately roll in powdered sugar. Repeat a second time for a coating that is beautifully white and soft.

The Lemon and Raisin Cake

Soft and fragrant, this cake combines the freshness of lemon with the sweetness of raisins. Simple and generous, it was often prepared to accompany afternoon family tea or coffee.

INGREDIENTS

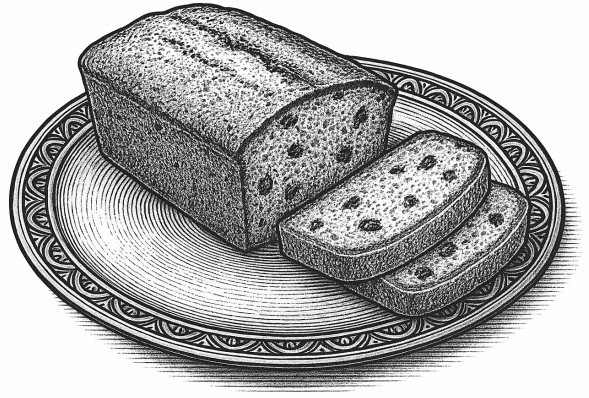
- 3 eggs
- 1 lemon (juice + zest)
- 1 packet vanilla sugar
- 1 glass powdered sugar
- 100 g butter
- 3 glasses flour
- 1 packet baking powder
- 1 glass raisins (previously tossed in a little flour)

PREPARATION

In a bowl, beat the powdered sugar with the softened butter until smooth and creamy. Add the eggs one at a time, continuing to beat. Then incorporate the vanilla sugar, lemon juice, and zest.

Mix the flour with the baking powder, then gradually add to the mixture. Finish by folding in the floured raisins. Pour the batter into a buttered and floured loaf pan.

Bake in the oven at medium temperature (about 180°C / 350°F) until the cake is golden and a knife inserted comes out clean. Unmold while warm and lightly dust with powdered sugar before serving.



The Egg Flan

A great classic of family tables, egg flan delights with its simplicity and creaminess. Made with just a few ingredients, it evokes childhood and shared snacks, when the scent of vanilla and caramel filled the home.

INGREDIENTS (for 6)

- 1 liter whole milk
- 8 eggs
- 130 g sugar
- ½ vanilla pod

For the caramel :

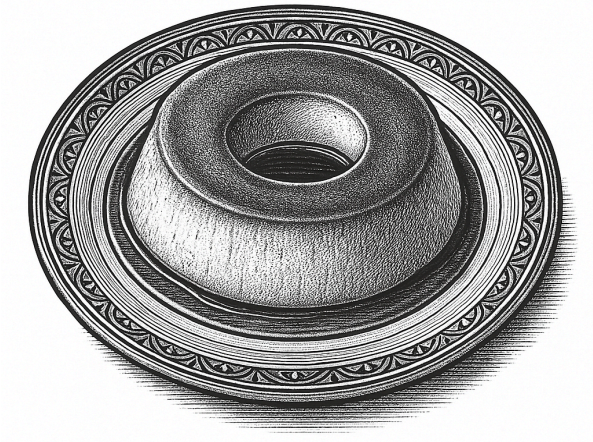
- 130 g sugar
- 10 cl water

PREPARATION

First prepare the caramel: put the sugar and water in a saucepan, let it melt, and cook gently until it reaches a golden color without browning. Immediately pour into a mold. Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F).

In a saucepan, bring the milk to a boil with the vanilla pod split in half. In a large bowl, beat the eggs with the sugar until the mixture whitens. Gradually pour the hot milk over the eggs, whisking constantly.

Pour the mixture into the caramelized mold. Bake in a bain-marie for about 45 minutes, until the flan is set. Let cool, place in the refrigerator, then unmold just before serving.



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Her dishes nourished us, her laughter warmed us.

Beyond the flavors, she passed down to us an art of living: one of sharing, patience, and generosity.

This book gathers her recipes as gestures of love, so that her cuisine may continue to cross generations and unite those who sit around the table.

Chama Ourabah

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